

Many Advantages for Big City Boys

By MEYER BLOOMFIELD

hoods. Primitive is the only word that quite describes the bare, resourceless life which was the kindergarten for the future martyr.

The handicapped city boy has much in his favor, though the want of the things he ought to have is so glaring that many fine men and women are devoting their best to bring a fuller life within reach of the coming citizens.

Outside of certain benighted localities, where infant lives are still sacrificed to cotton and glass Molochs, the good sense of the American people has made some provision for access to a teacher and to books. In our cities and towns there are opportunities for the poorest boy which would have made Lincoln think himself a prince, could he have had a taste of them.

This is not saying that the city boy everywhere has everything which it is his right to have. There are not nearly enough play spaces and breathing spaces in any of our cities, and though our schools are splendid, many a boy must work too hard to stay in them, and many are forced to leave before they have been shaped for a career of service to themselves and to their fellows.

It is only by contrast that we say the city boy of today is well off, but with a still higher outlook, and from the point of view of thoroughgoing justice and good will, one must ask for ever so much more before one can say that we are doing all that a highly civilized people can do.

Lincoln's gaunt environment was a hard school to begin life in. That did not make Lincoln. It could not break him, as it must have broken many a young life; that is about all one can say for it. How he rose above his unlovely setting and came before his fellows as one of the saints of the world is the story which the city boy cannot ponder too often.

While no backwoods need clearing in the overcrowded metropolis, there is as much need of heroic stuff there and the same challenge to it that Lincoln knew. The conditions which beset the growing child in almost every city of over 5,000 people are not the most ideal. The forces for good are not without the competition of the opposite influences and the tender nature of the child is the battleground between the conflicting elements. There is a social tug-of-war in our cities and the child is the prize.

There is much to be thankful for in the opportunities that a city provides today—great schools, bath houses, gymnasiums and many enlightened people who are studying the needs of the children. But no time ever called for more patriotism and valor than do these days of transition from isolated living to co-operative living. Those who can serve their fellows well are the leaders of the time. In the boys' clubs and in the class rooms this leadership is being trained. It will in time be directed toward doing away with tenements and playless streets, with the many things that rob the child of its heavenly prerogatives.

The log cabin boy has one thing in common with the tenement boy. Each is master of a destiny. The Lincoln type has not passed away from the boy world. Let us do away with the things that check the growth of this priceless national wealth.

Meyer Bloomfield

How Some South American Girls Work

By EDWARD CROSS, London, Eng.

Some of the most beautiful women in the world; I think, are to be found in Chili. In Santiago and Valparaiso the women, even of the plebeian class, with their flashing black eyes, raven tresses and finely chiseled features, are extraordinarily attractive. In the afternoon in the shopping districts, when the wealthy and fashionable senoras and señoritas come on parade, they constitute a spectacle that is quite enrapturing.

In both these towns there are women employed as assistant conductors on the street cars. They are active in moving about and selling tickets to the passengers, and I learned that the companies preferred them in this respect to men, having found that there was less danger of the coin sticking to feminine fingers.

In Bolivia, too, the women take the eye of a foreigner by their very fetching footgear. It is the custom for the ladies of La Paz to have their boots made in Paris, and these beauties will not have them except that the tops reach almost to their knees. The skirts of their costumes are correspondingly short, exposing in their whole length the neat and natty French boot, which nine times in ten encases a foot of the real Trilby type, and making a picture to which no man turns his back.

Novel Manner of Avoiding Family Jars

By Walter B. Palmer, Pittsburgh, Pa.

We have adopted a new rule in our household, namely, that there shall positively be no discussion of any troublesome subject during dinner, nor for one hour thereafter. We don't bar

talk, far from it; we can laugh and chatter all we want to; but no discussion; the reason therefore being this:

We are naturally a nervous bunch, well meaning but touchy; what our friends would politely call "high strung, sensitive people," our enemies, "scrappy," and when we get to discussing things—well, even with the best intentions all around, each member of the family is apt to hold his own opinion pretty strenuously and to express it pretty vigorously; and while, truly, ours is a very happy family, yet, when we had got fairly launched on one of those discursive sessions we could manage to spoil our dinner and to make ourselves, all around, pretty miserable.

It was poor business, and so we have adopted this new rule, positively prohibiting discussion of our troubles at table; with results thus far most felicitous.

Days of Whaling Are Not Passed

By THOMAS H. MASON, Boston, Mass.

The days of whaling are not passed. Strange to say that just at present one of the best fields for whaling is in Chile. The reported catch for the past season in the southern seas was 400 whales. The oil amounted to 2,000 tons and was valued at about \$215,000 to England, 20 tons of whalebone to France.

There is only one company at present doing business in whaling in Chile. Their equipment comprises three steam whaling vessels of 3,000 tons used during the season as floating stations and afterwards for the transportation of oil and whalebone to Europe.

The whaling boats the company owns range from 90 to 117 feet in length and average 30 or 40 tons. Each is equipped with a machine gun that fires an explosive harpoon.

In that very readable book, "Abraham Lincoln, the Boy and the Man," we get a picture of young Lincoln's surroundings which contrasts strangely even with the most unfavored of city neighbor-

OLD AND NEW CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

HERE are two days of supreme importance to all Christendom when, no matter what the difference in creeds, the whole Christian world unites in the observance of what are rightly regarded as the most significant anniversaries in the year. On Easter and Christmas all the churches are at one.

The story of the first Christmas is so universally known that it needs no repetition, and one hesitates to repeat it for fear of marling the beauty and simplicity of the original narrative. The story of the origin of the observance of Christmas is quite another thing, however, and may be approached in a more mundane spirit. We take part in the time honored customs which are so intimately associated with the day without stopping to consider whether they had their inception in the Christmas idea or whether they ever had any other significance than they now have. We trim the Christmas tree, distribute our presents, decorate with holly and mistletoe and sit down to a big dinner, and if we ever stop to think why we do these things (and it is more than likely that we don't) why, it is just the Christmas custom and that's all there is to it.

But it is very far from being all. The customs which seem such an integral part of the festival are inextricably tangled up with Roman, Scandinavian, German and Celtic ceremonials, in which very many of them had their origin. Our Christmas, when we investigate it, is found to be a melting pot of pagan traditions and practices without number, purged of their old significance and adapted to the higher faith.

The observer halts before the contemplation of the countless variety of customs associated with Christmas in all lands, both in the past and the present day. To describe them all would fill a good sized book, so we can only refer briefly here to some of the most prominent of them.

The early fathers of the church, however much they might have desired to banish all pagan practices from the exercises of religion, were perforce obliged to allow their converts to retain part of the old usages. It was an impossibility to put an end to them, so they wisely decided that it was better to let the people follow their bent along certain lines rather than to antagonize them by insisting too strongly on a course which they were bound to oppose. The more glaringly heathenish rites were eradicated, and those which remained were purged of their more objectionable features and infused with a new spirit.

Christmas was not observed at all, so far as we can find any record, for 200 or 300 years after the birth of Christ, and as the event had occurred in such a humble fashion men were quite unable to determine its date when they began to interest themselves in keeping the anniversary. There is not a month in the year for which some authority has not claimed the honor of the nativity. One thing is certain, and that is that it could not have occurred on the 25th of December, as this date is the height of the rainy season in Judea, as in California, and it is quite unlikely that the shepherds could have been watching their flocks by night under those conditions.

The first attempt on record to assign any date for the nativity was made in Egypt about 200 A. D., when May 29 was the date mentioned. From that time forward claims were made for various dates, January 6 and December 25 being the most in favor up to the time of Chrysostom in the fourth century, when the latter gained the preference.

This date was not chosen entirely without reason. The celebration of the winter solstice was one of the chief festivals of Rome, and among the Celts and Germans it was regarded with even greater significance. The sun, as the giver of light and heat, and consequently of life, has been an object of worship and adoration from the remotest times down to the present day; therefore the period of the winter solstice as marking the renewal of the power of the sun was a time of rejoicing among all peoples who either worshiped the sun directly or who regarded it as a manifestation of one of their deities. The 12 days between December 25 and January 6 were regarded as extremely important by the Teutonic races, who believed that at that time the influence of the gods was more powerfully directed toward the earth than at any other. Nothing could be more natural, therefore, than that these peoples, on turning to Christianity, should fix the commemoration of the appearance of the Saviour on the earth at the same time of year they had been accustomed to acknowledge the glory of the sun. The significance of the two events is parallel; the one heralds new life to the physical world and the other the deliverance of the human race from the powers of evil.

It has been pointed out that in the early period of the church it was considered wise to allow the converts to retain some of the old customs. The observance of Christmas was therefore encouraged as a substitute for the pagan festivals, in particular for the Roman saturnalia, which occurred in December and which was so popular that while it originally lasted for one day only (the 17th), it was first extended to three days and later, under the Emperor Claudius, to seven. The festival was opened by public sacrifice before the temple of Saturn, followed by a great public banquet, in which all classes participated. From this time all the people seemed to go mad; the complete liberty prevailed and it was a time of universal festivity and merry making. Crowds swarmed through the streets shouting "To Saturnalia," a form of greeting similar to the modern "Merry Christmas." It was a holiday time in the widest sense; schools and law courts were closed and the senate adjourned; no criminal was executed and no war was proclaimed. The slaves enjoyed an equality with their masters, and even served them at the table. The people occupied themselves in calling on one another, in exchanging presents and attending banquets. There was always one day especially devoted to the children, a custom to which we may trace the particular significance of Christmas to children down to the present time.

Certain other practices of the Saturnalia which Christmas has preserved related to candles, images and cakes. Candles were always in evidence at this time, as were small images made either of baked clay or dough. The Germans today always make a practice of baking great quantities of all kinds of Christmas cakes, which are an important and indispensable adjunct to the occasion.

The custom of decorating with evergreens at Christmas has the tradition of ages back of it. As far back as history goes people have been in the habit of using flowers and greens in all sorts of festivals. The use of the mistletoe, however, is a survival from the ancient Celts and Scandinavians, to whom it was an object of particular veneration at all times and especially when it grew on an oak. When found growing on this tree the Druids cut it with solemn ceremonies and used it in their sacrificial rites. It was believed to possess magic qualities of potent power. It is still potent, but only in the matter of conferring privileges.

The first historic mention of a Christmas tree was made in Strasburg in 1605, but the Danes go farther back than that. They have a sweet old legend relating to the time when Ansgar first preached Christianity to the Danes, wherein is told how the Lord sent his three messengers, Faith, Hope and Charity, to help light the first Christmas tree. They sought for one that should be as high as hope and wide as love, and that bore the sign of the cross on every bough and they finally found it in the balsam fir.

Beliefs which have been cherished for ages generally die hard, and the church, realizing this, introduced other practices into the old customs which survived from paganism. Such were the miracle plays and dramatic representations of early events in Christ's life, which received great attention during the middle ages and of which the Christmas carols may be considered an offshoot. These enjoyed great popularity throughout all Europe, but particularly in England, where in many villages today it is customary for troops of men and boys, called the waits, to go from door to door singing



carols for several nights before Christmas.

Similarly in some of the country districts in France the children make the rounds of the village, carrying a little cradle on their backs and singing carols for pennies.

Santa Claus is not as familiar a figure in France as he is among us. There, instead of hanging up their stockings to be filled by him, they place their shoes in front of the fireplace on Christmas eve, so that the Christchild may leave their presents in them.

In north Germany, however, it is not the Christchild who gives the presents, but his servant, Knecht Ruprecht. This individual is usually represented by a man who clothes himself in a white robe and high buskins, a mask and an enormous wig. So attired he presents himself at the door and announces that he is sent by the Christchild to distribute gifts among the children. The parents receive him ceremoniously, and he inquires whether each child has been good, and if the answer is in the affirmative the child receives his presents; but if not, Knecht Ruprecht gives the parents a stick with the advice to use it often.

In Belgium the children go about carrying paper stars with a lighted candle in the center from Christmas to Epiphany, to commemorate the appearance of the star of Bethlehem. There is a similar practice among some of the natives of Alaska belonging to the Greek church. A procession of men, women and children is formed, at the head of which is carried a large figure of a star covered with brightly colored paper. Two men also march at the head, carrying lanterns on long poles. The procession makes the rounds of the village, stopping at each house, where the marchers are invited to come in and take refreshments. They always accept and after singing a carol or two they march on to the next house. This performance is kept up through Christmas week, but after the second night it is varied by the introduction of a new feature. The star bearers are pursued by men and boys, who try to catch them and destroy their stars, and while the significance of the game is supposed to lie in the fact that it is a representation of the soldiers of Herod killing the children of Bethlehem, the players are mainly concerned in the opportunities for a frolic which it affords and bother themselves little about the event it is supposed to commemorate.

The old custom of burning the yule log still endures in certain parts of Europe. It is an outgrowth of the feast of Jul among the ancient Scandinavians, when every winter at the solstice they kindled enormous fires in honor of the god Thor. Among the Slavonians of southeastern Europe the bringing in and burning of the yule log is an elaborate ceremony. Some time during the week before Christmas, or on the day before, an oak or beech tree is selected, but on account of the superstition that such trees are endowed with souls it is necessary to observe certain precautions while cutting it down. The hewers must wear gloves throughout the whole proceeding and before they dare lay an ax to the tree they must face the east and cross themselves three times, and in felling it they must take care that it falls toward the east. Evil consequences will follow if they do not chop off a chicken's head on the fresh stump, using the same ax with which they cut down the tree. The first chip is the prize of the housewife, who preserves it to put under the cream dish, so that the cream will be rich and abundant during the year.

After sprinkling the newly hewn log with barley to insure good crops for the coming year it is ready to load on the ox wagon and the homeward journey is so timed that the house is not reached until after twilight falls. The housewife is on the lookout for it and as soon as she sees it coming she hastens to hide the table, the spoons, the fire shovel and the dining chairs, which are not brought to light again until the log has been kindled.

It is generally about midnight when the log is brought into the house, and it is received at the doorway by the father, who wishes his family a "Good morning and merry Christmas" three times. They, on greeting him in turn, shake over him some barley and, this ceremonial having been observed, he drags the log up to the hearth by means of a chain wound around it. In case the log is brought into the house before evening three sticks are cut from it and leaned against the eastern wall, where they remain, crowned with ivy, until the log is burned out.

The log must be paid marked respect by everybody up to the very last if good luck is to be enjoyed during the year, and no one had better approach it barefooted unless he wants to condemn himself to a whole year's suffering with sore feet.

Christmas eve is distinguished by feasting and if a visitor appears he is sprinkled with grain from a sieve by the master of the house, in return for which greeting he places three candles wound around with gold and silver thread in the bottom of the sieve. These are lit at the beginning of the meal and when everybody has had his fill the master of the house extinguishes them with a bit of bread dipped in wine.

Much more could be told concerning the way Christmas is observed in different localities and many curious beliefs and practices would thus be brought to light. Some can be traced directly to a purely Christian source; the origin of others is unexplainable, and very many prove to be relics of the ages preceding the introduction of Christianity. The features briefly touched upon above are only the skimmings of innumerable usages relating to this one day. There is no other day in the year about which such a great people so delight to commemorate and none which is regarded with such deep and universal veneration.